

June 20, 2006

The Honorable John Dingell
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Dingell:

The undersigned are writing to express our strong opposition to H.R. 2355, the "Health Care Choice Act," which may be considered by the House of Representatives this summer. We must find solutions to the health care crisis facing our country, but H.R. 2355 is not the answer.

The "Health Care Choice Act" would preempt state laws by allowing insurers offering individual health insurance plans to choose one state and its rules to regulate plans sold in all states. Insurers could select the state with the most lenient rules, and thereby circumvent state laws that protect consumers from unfair rates and rate hikes. These insurers could avoid other critical consumer protections such as guaranteed coverage for individuals with preexisting conditions, as well as state requirements that insurers cover cancer screenings and treatment, diabetes supplies and education, mental health services, preventive care, rehabilitation, well-child care and immunizations, maternity care, and other important health care needs.

In addition to the loss of consumer protections, there would be no effective enforcement mechanism to protect consumers against abuses by insurers. Under this bill, a state insurance commissioner would have no jurisdiction or ability to enforce rules for a policy issued through another state, leaving a regulatory vacuum for consumers.

Although some supporters of H.R. 2355 claim that the bill would increase the number of people with health care coverage, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that the proposal would have almost no impact on the number of uninsured. In fact, CBO has found the bill would result in one million people *losing* employer-sponsored coverage. Instead of making quality health insurance more affordable and stable for those who need it most, this proposal would do just the opposite. Due in large part to the loss of job-based coverage for low-income workers, the CBO also found that Medicaid spending would increase by \$1 billion between 2007 and 2015.

H.R. 2355 would not only harm people in the already volatile individual market, it would also result in increased costs and lost coverage for those left in the small group market. We urge you to reject this deeply flawed proposal, and instead consider real solutions to expand access to affordable and comprehensive coverage, help those most in need, provide strong consumer protections and offer meaningful solutions for covering the uninsured.

Thank you,

National Partnership for Women & Families
AFL-CIO
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
Alliance for Advancing Nonprofit Health Care
Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

American Academy of HIV Medicine
American Academy of Physician Assistants
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Chiropractic Association
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Podiatric Medical Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
Committee of Ten Thousand
Communications Workers of America
Consumers Union
Delta Dental Plans Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Families USA
Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights
HIP Health Plan of New York
Hemophilia Federation of America
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Health Law Program
National Hemophilia Foundation
National Mental Health Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Women's Law Center
Public Citizen
Service Employees International Union
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA)
The Arc of the United States
U.S. PIRG
United Cerebral Palsy